

Written Testimony of Representative Suzan DelBene (WA-01)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 1: American Innovation

As someone who represents a hub of science and technological innovation – and who made a career in the tech industry before coming to Congress – I am no stranger to the importance of a thriving “innovation economy.” But today, I would like to urge my colleagues to think bigger, and more broadly about what that really means. When we talk about building a strong manufacturing sector in the US, technology must be part of the conversation.

The United States has been at the forefront of groundbreaking technological advances. We can maintain that leadership, but we need to make sure that our infrastructure and workforce are equipped for an increasingly technology-dependent world.

The line between “technology” and “non-technology” or what we refer to as software and hardware sectors is diminishing as the demand for software-driven and Internet-connected products grows at lightning speed. We are entering a new era of connected devices called the Internet of Things that holds transformative promise for our economy and the way we live, work, and play. Our homes, cities, and even our wrists [hold up Band] will be connected in unprecedented ways. And this means that the people designing these products will need to understand how to produce technologically complex products that interact with other products. And it also means that we will need to understand how to handle and protect the communications and vast amounts of data that will come from these products.

Traditionally, technology has been thought of as a nice-to-have, but it is increasingly a must-have—a basic part of an organization’s infrastructure. Investing in that infrastructure is not only a smart thing to do that will yield great returns, it’s critical to maintaining security and protecting privacy and intellectual property. And it isn’t just internal to an organization, from laying fiber to make sure every community in America has meaningful web access, to securing government and private sector networks, and equipping our cities and towns with life- and money-saving technologies, investments in our technological infrastructure help build the foundation for a strong economy.

At the same time we need to train our students and workers for 21st century careers. That means developing a plan to ensure that our workers have the tools they need to drive the next generation of innovation in this country. We should be including computer programming, or coding, into every school curriculum. We need to encourage creativity and invention emphasizing not just STEM education, but STEAM: Science, Technology, Education, Arts and Mathematics. And we need to support those already in the workforce to pick up skills that will allow them to adapt to rapid changes in technology.

If we want to continue to “Make it in America,” we must support innovation, invest in a 21st century technology infrastructure and educate our workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.